



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
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CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION
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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Attorney General McGraw Announces Settlement with Stevens Funeral Home in Madison; Funds Misappropriated From Consumers

CHARLESON - Attorney General Darrell McGraw today announced a settlement with SFH, Inc., a Madison funeral home whose former funeral director, T.R. Stevens Jr. ("Stevens") admitted to misappropriating more than \$180,000.00 paid in advance by consumers for funeral services.

McGraw's office began investigating the funeral home after Stevens, the operator and co-owner of the funeral home, vacated the business in March of this year. Shortly thereafter consumers contacted McGraw's office because they feared that their preneed funeral contracts would not be honored. State law requires funeral homes to maintain consumers' advance payments in a special account for safekeeping until death and report all transactions to the Attorney General's Preneed Funeral Services Division ("Division"). However, a March 26 audit uncovered a large number of deposits which Stevens had never disclosed, and inquiries to financial institutions revealed that many consumers' funds had never made it to the bank.

Stevens has fully cooperated with the investigation by providing additional evidence of misappropriations to assist McGraw's office in contacting consumers and recovering their money. The funeral home has now been sold and \$224,000.00 in refunds and interest will be paid to consumers once the settlement is entered in the Circuit Court of Boone County. Stevens has agreed to a permanent injunction against handling preneed contracts if he ever returns to the funeral industry. Stevens' former business partners have also cooperated, and willingly agreed to pay any additional claims which may arise after the settlement is entered.

Paying in advance for funeral services is common among seniors, to alleviate burdens for family members and make the purchase more affordable. The Attorney General's office licenses funeral homes who accept advance payments, and is charged with investigating potential violations of state preneed funeral contract laws.

Any consumer with questions about an advance payment to SFH, Stevens Funeral Home, or T.R. Stevens, Jr. may contact the Attorney General's Consumer Hotline at 800-368-8808 or 304-558-8986.

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